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**Russian Parks and Gardens, by Peter Hayden,
Frances Lincoln, 256 pages, £35.00, ISBN 0-7112-2430-7.**

This long-awaited English-language book on the history of Russian gardens has already brought its author the Russian Academy of Fine Arts' gold medal - the first to be awarded to a foreigner. Peter Hayden knows what he is writing about at first hand. During multiple trips to Russia he collected valuable material and his brilliant knowledge of Russian allowed him to use a great variety of articles and other literary sources. The book is illustrated by Mr Hayden's own beautiful photographs. Both those who seek a quality academic edition and a good guide to Russian gardens will be satisfied by his thorough approach. Each chapter is devoted to a particular period and geographical region and starts with a brief explanatory essay on the historical and cultural situation. This allows even those unacquainted with Russian history to prepare for the descriptions of the most important gardens. Especially pleasing is the fact that the author does not confine himself to easily reachable parks around Moscow and St Petersburg, but also explores important provincial sites, some of them now in Ukraine and the Baltic states, and often not yet thoroughly described in Russian.

Mr Hayden's British background allows him to look at Russian culture from a distance and notice connections and details that have slipped the attention of Russian authors. Moreover, using his broad erudition to make comparisons between Russian and European gardens makes the text more understandable and vivid for British readers - and of special importance for Russian ones.

The book mostly covers the 18th and 19th centuries though brief chapters are devoted to earlier parks and gardens (mostly 17th-century) and to those of the Soviet period. I could have wished, however, that the 20th century had received as much of the author's attention as the two previous ones, and that he had been able to bring it up-to-date by mentioning the recent restoration of some sites.

Mr Hayden recounts that he learned Russian as a part of his military service during the Cold War period; but instead of becoming an anti-soviet spy or soldier he became intrigued by Russian literature, architecture and gardens. If only every military service could be like his, how much better would this world become!

Review by Alla Vronskaya (December 2006).

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